

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6445

As of January 18, 2018

Title: An act relating to providing postsecondary education to enhance education opportunities and public safety.

Brief Description: Providing postsecondary education to enhance education opportunities and public safety.

Sponsors: Senators Dhingra, O'Ban, Darneille, Saldaña, Wellman, Cleveland, Billig, Fain, Hasegawa, Keiser, Kuderer and Palumbo.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Human Services & Corrections: 1/17/18.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows the Department of Corrections (DOC) and the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) to conduct and offer appropriate postsecondary education degree programs.
- Clarifies that all incarcerated adults are eligible to receive a postsecondary education degree, regardless of sentence type or length of incarceration.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

Staff: Keri Waterland (786-7490)

Background: DOC contracts with SBCTC to provide basic education and job training within each of the state's 12 adult prisons. Each adult prison offers adult basic education programs, which provide foundational education in reading, writing, math, and the English language, including General Education Development (GED) preparation programs. Several of these adult prisons also offer High School 21+, a competency-based high school diploma program. With High School 21+, students can earn high school credits by proving they have mastered required subjects through past education or life experience. Students then take classes to fill in the gaps and earn a high school diploma. Job-search and anger management courses are also available at every prison.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

In 2017, the Legislature expanded state prison educational opportunities to include associate degree programs. Under this law, state prison education opportunities are limited to basic adult education, associate degree programs, and vocational training. Incarcerated adults sentenced to life without parole, the death penalty, or who are deportable aliens are excluded from earning an associate degree. DOC must prioritize its resources to meet goals for inmates that relate to obtaining basic adult educational skills, vocational skills, and programs that are in compliance with an offender's individual reentry plan. DOC is prohibited from using its base appropriation for any postsecondary education degree program other than an associate degree or vocational training.

Summary of Bill: The SBCTC may authorize any community or technical college to promote and conduct postsecondary education degree opportunities and training for incarcerated adults through new or expanded partnerships between the SBCTC and DOC. Statutes are amended to allow postsecondary education degree programs for inmates in the state prison system within existing appropriations. DOC may implement postsecondary education degree programs at any state correctional institution. Incarcerated adults sentenced to life without parole, the death penalty, or who are deportable aliens are allowed to receive a postsecondary degree in an education program offered by DOC.

Inmates who do not meet DOC's priority criteria for the state-funded postsecondary degree program are required to pay the costs for participation in a postsecondary degree program. DOC may select inmates to participate in the state-funded postsecondary education degree programs by considering the following conditions based on the priority criteria:

- the offender has less than five years before release;
- the offender does not already have a postsecondary education degree; and
- the offender's individual reentry plan includes participation in a postsecondary education degree program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Enthusiastically support this bill. The vast majority will return and need jobs and stability for their lives. Education can help decrease homelessness and recidivism. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy's study shows positive impacts on correctional education, it reduces costs and improves lives. This bill caught us by pleasant surprise. Last year SB 5069 gave DOC the authorization to fund AA degrees, and it was a really good start. DOC has expanded because of 5069 and done so within existing funds. This new bill addresses all of our concerns with the bill that passed last year, it retains important pieces, but it would be difficult to offer more degrees without additional funding. According to a PEW research study, two-thirds of states have reduced crime and imprisonment. According to the PEW study, many states did better than Washington. Investment in postsecondary education programs are a good investment and help with recidivism and mass incarceration.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Manka Dhingra, Prime Sponsor; Elisabeth Smith, ACLU of Washington; Brian Walsh, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.